

The Ethics and Ontology of Cosmopolitanism: Education for a Shared Humanity

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It is argued that Cosmopolitan theory and its main competitor, Realism, issue from fundamentally different presuppositions. Realists presuppose that communal/national identity overrides a shared humanity to the degree that the moral consideration of others stops at the border of the society. Based upon this presupposition, Realists also assume the existence of a perpetual state of war between nations. In contrast, on the basis of a shared humanity Cosmopolitans assert the existence of a duty of moral consideration to all human beings. They argue that if the fundamental moral value of a shared humanity is acknowledged, then a universal duty of moral consideration follows. They argue that this duty morally requires nations to conduct their relations with each other in accordance with ethical principles consistent with the intrinsic value and dignity of a shared humanity. In addition, as exemplified in Gandhi's philosophy, Cosmopolitans posit particular ontological beliefs that require moral agents to engage in processes of internal self-transformation. They believe that internal self-transformation is necessary in order to develop the internal capacities to morally respond to the human dignity of others. It will be argued that the aims of a cosmopolitan education logically follow from this ontological perspective.

Cosmopolitans posit the existence of ethical values and principles that are universally applicable to all human beings, regardless of culture, ethnicity, religion, or nationality. They maintain that our shared humanity carries with it a moral imperative to respect and care for the dignity of *every* human being, an imperative that takes precedence over local and national political and moral values and principles. In a political sense, as Martha Nussbaum (1996) suggests, cosmopolitanism mandates that “we should give our first allegiance to no mere form of government, no temporal power, but to the community made up of the humanity of all human beings (p. 7).” In turn, cosmopolitans call for the education of citizens who can morally and politically respond to all human beings in ways consistent with the inherent dignity of a shared humanity.

It is argued that Cosmopolitan theory and its main competitor, Realism, issue from fundamentally different presuppositions. Realists presuppose that communal/national identity overrides a shared humanity to the degree that the moral consideration of others stops at the border of the society. Based upon this presupposition, Realists also assume the existence of a perpetual state of war between nations. In contrast, on the basis of a shared humanity Cosmopolitans assert the existence of a duty of moral consideration to all human beings. They argue that if the fundamental moral value of a shared humanity is acknowledged, then a universal duty of moral consideration follows. They argue that this duty morally requires nations to conduct their relations with each other in accordance with ethical principles consistent with the intrinsic value and dignity of a shared humanity. In addition, as exemplified in Gandhi's philosophy, Cosmopolitans posit particular ontological beliefs that require moral agents to engage in processes of internal self-transformation. They believe that internal self-transformation is necessary in order to develop the internal capacities to morally respond to the human dignity of others. It will be argued that the aims of a cosmopolitan education logically follow from this ontological perspective. This paper is a work of philosophy, and is written in a normative voice.

Realism and Cosmopolitanism

Realism is a theory of international relations that denies the existence of morality in the international arena. It maintains that relations between nation-states are purely political, in the sense that they exclusively concern interests and power, not what is right or good *per se* (Cady, 1989; Doyle, 1997; Smith, 1986). This moral skepticism in the Realist tradition is based upon the absence of international sovereignty, rendering the international system an anarchy. Realism assumes that the interstate arena is an anarchy, a state of relations without the existence of a sovereign power to enforce morality and law (Hinsley, 1986). Realists argue that adherence to moral principle, law, and even mutual promises, such as contracts, agreements, covenants, and treaties, is contingent upon the existence of an overarching authority. This authority requires a sovereign power that is capable of enforcing obligation. States will abide by morality and law, not on principle, but out of fear of retaliation. In the absence of a sovereign, it is rational to use any means necessary, including violence, to pursue one's own interests, as long as one is in a position of superior power. This is the condition of anarchy, a Hobbesian state of nature; it is inherently "a war of all against all."

Power (and fear) takes precedence over law and morality under the conditions of anarchy. War is always imminent in the international anarchical system. Under the conditions of anarchy, self-defense is rational. Others will respond out of self-defense with an increase in arms, not knowing one's intentions with certainty. The result is escalation, leading to an increased probability of the outbreak of conflict. This phenomena is referred to as the *security dilemma*: to defend one's self is to increase the probability of conflict; defense, pursued in order to be secure, leads to insecurity (Jervis, 1991). Therefore an inevitable and perpetual state of insecurity is generated. It is then argued that under these conditions the only way to maintain a state of cold war, a state of relations free from actual fighting, is through a balance of power. If power is balanced between states, wherein no one state or group of states is dominant, then a state of cold war or negative peace can be maintained without the actual outbreak of hostility, for the balance of power deters aggression by posing a significant retaliatory threat (Doyle, 1997; Keohane & Nye, 1977; Smith, 1986).

From the perspective of Realism, morality is grounded in and confined within the boundaries of the *polis*, and given that there does not exist an international community *per se*, morality and law cannot exist beyond the borders of the nation-state (Brown, 1992). However, Realism does posit the existence of a moral community existing within the borders of the nation-state. There exists a national interest, which state agents are obligated to protect. Fundamentally, there exists a moral imperative to provide security for the people of the nation. Security is first and foremost the basic obligation of the State. Security is a basic human right, basic in the sense that it is necessary for the enjoyment of all other rights (Shue, 1980). If one's security of person is not ensured, then any semblance of a good life is undermined. The State, whose sovereign power is derived from the people (Sharp, 1973), is therefore obligated, since all rights entail obligations, to provide security for all individuals under its jurisdiction. Security is so fundamental that one could argue that it is the core organizing principle of the State. The State's claim to a monopoly control of the means of violence is based upon this security obligation. The monopoly control of the means of violence in turn rests on its claims of sovereignty and self-determination (Held, 1991, 1995).

If nations are sovereign, then they have a *prima facie* obligation to protect the security of their own citizens. This is a powerful and seemingly irrefutable claim: the State is obligated to provide security of the people under its jurisdiction. From a Realist perspective, given this basic obligation, the national interest and the security of the people are to be pursued through the prudent exercise of power, including the deployment of lethal force. If state agents are charged with the protection

of their citizens, then the pursuit of security through the exercise of power becomes morally justified, for the nation is pursuing what is right: the security of its citizens and the preservation and advancement of the national interest (Brown, 1992).

The question is whether the nation-state and its citizens also have a “natural duty” to non-nationals outside its borders. In other words, in providing security to its own people, does it have any moral obligation to those outside the boundaries of the national moral and political community? Is the pursuit of one’s national interest a legitimate justification for inflicting harm, and even death, onto the citizens of other societies? Can partiality to the good of one’s community, and the citizens that comprise it, be so exclusive to the point of a complete denial of concern for the well-being of other human beings? Are all human beings deserving of mutual moral consideration? Should we educate citizens to be able to morally respond to all human beings?

These questions demarcate the dividing line between Realists and Cosmopolitans. They issue from fundamentally different presuppositions. Realists presuppose that communal/national identity overrides a shared humanity to the degree that moral consideration stops at the border of the society. This presupposition in turn generates a corollary assumption of the existence a state of perpetual war.

Cosmopolitans assert the existence of a duty of moral consideration to all human beings on the basis of a shared humanity. What is universal in, and definitive of, cosmopolitanism is the presupposition of the shared inherent dignity of humanity. As Martha Nussbaum states:

[Human good can] be objective in the sense that it is justifiable by reference to reasons that do not derive merely from local traditions and practices, but rather from *features of humanness that lie beneath all local traditions and are there to be seen whether or not they are in fact recognized in local traditions*. (Perry, 1998, p. 68)

If a shared humanity is presupposed, and if humanity is understood to possess an equal inherent value and dignity, then a shared humanity possesses a fundamental moral value. If the fundamental moral value of humanity is acknowledged, then a universal duty of moral consideration follows, for to deny moral consideration to any human being is to ignore (not recognize) their intrinsic value, and thereby, to violate their dignity. The duty of moral consideration in turn morally requires nations and peoples to conduct their relations in accordance with ethical principles that properly instantiate the intrinsic value and dignity of a shared humanity. If valid, the fundamental aims of the education of citizens should be based upon this imperative.

In order to further explicate this cosmopolitanism perspective, the philosophy of one of history’s greatest cosmopolitans, Mohandas K. Gandhi, is explored below.

Reflections on Gandhi’s Cosmopolitan Philosophy

While most commentators focus on Gandhi’s conception and advocacy of nonviolence, it is generally recognized that his core philosophical beliefs regarding the essential unity of humanity and the universal applicability of nonviolence as a moral and political ideal places Gandhi in the cosmopolitan tradition as broadly understood (Iyer, [1973] 1983; Kumar Giri, 2006). At the core of Gandhi’s philosophy are the interdependent values of *Satya* (Truth) and *Ahimsa* (nonviolence). Gandhi’s approach to nonviolent social transformation, *Satyagraha*, is the actualization in action of these two values (Bondurant, 1965; Iyer, [1973] 1983; Naess, 1974).

Gandhi's *Satya* is multifaceted. Its most fundamental meaning pertains to Truth as self-realization. *Satya* is derived from *sat*, Being. Truth is Being; realizing in full awareness one's authentic Being. Truth, in this sense, is the primary goal of life. Gandhi writes:

What I want to achieve . . . is self-realization . . . I live and move and have my being in pursuit of that goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field are directed to this same end. (Naess 1974, p. 35)

Self-realization, for Gandhi, requires "shedding the ego," "reducing one self to zero" (cited in Naess 1974, p. 37). The ego *per se* is not the real self; it is a fabrication. This egoic self must be transcended. As the egoic self loosens and one becomes increasingly self-aware, one deepens the realization of one's authentic being, and that being is experienced as unified with humanity and all living things.

Scholars normally understand human identity in terms of personality, which is a socially constructed self-concept constituted by a complex network of identifications and object relations. This construction is what we normally refer to as the ego or self-identity. Our egoic self-identity is *literally* a construction, based upon psychological identifications (Almaas, 1986a, 1986b; Batchelor, 1983).

From this perspective, the ego is a socially constructed entity, ultimately a fabrication of the discursive formations of culture; from this point of view, the self is exclusively egoic. This perspective has its origins in the claim that consciousness is solely intentional: the claim that consciousness is always *consciousness of* some object. From this presupposition, the socially constructed, discursive nature of the self is inferred. If consciousness is solely intentional, then the self is a construction, and, if the self is a construction, then it is always discursive – a pre-discursive self cannot exist.

It can be argued, however, that intentionality itself presupposes pre-intentional awareness. A distinction can be made between intentional consciousness and awareness. Intentional consciousness presupposes awareness that is always implicit in intentional consciousness. If intentional consciousness does not presuppose a pre-intentional awareness, if there is only consciousness of, then there is always a knower-known duality, and that duality leads to an infinite regress. To be conscious of an object X, one has to be conscious of one's consciousness of X, and one would have to be conscious of one's consciousness of one's consciousness of X, and one would have to be conscious of one's consciousness of one's consciousness of one's consciousness of X . . . ad infinitum^{3/4}reductio ad absurdum. Therefore, there must be implicit in intentional consciousness a level of awareness that is pre-intentional, pre-discursive, and non-positional (Forman, 1999). To be conscious of anything presupposes pre-intentional self-awareness, and being pre-intentional, awareness must be in turn pre-discursive and non-positional (Almaas, 1986a, 1986b; Aurobindo, 1989, 2001; Batchelor, 1983; Buber, 1970; Forman, 1999; Fromm, 1976). When the ego is shed, a pre-discursive, nonpositional self-awareness is revealed. One can be reflexively aware of one's consciousness.

Gandhi held that pre-discursive self-awareness, the core of our being, is unified and interdependent with all living things. He writes: "I believe in the essential unity of man and, for that matter, of all that lives (Naess 1974, p. 43)." In an ontological sense, Gandhi maintains that *Satya*, Truth, is self-realization, a realization of one's self-awareness as essentially unified with and thereby existing in solidarity with all human beings and with all living things. Pre-discursive self-awareness is

experienced as non-positional, and, being non-positional, it is unbounded; it exists as a field of awareness that is interconnected with all sentient beings. This state is an *experience* and is only known experientially. Therefore, the assertion of a shared humanity is based upon a common level of being. Human intentional consciousness is expressed in a vast plurality of cultural expressions; implicit within this plurality, existing as its ground, is a shared level of awareness of being that unites us.

From the perspective of ontological Truth, nonviolence follows from the unity and interdependence of humanity and life; violence damages all forms of life, including one's self. Nonviolence uplifts all. Gandhi writes:

I do not believe . . . that an individual may gain spiritually and those who surround him suffer. I believe in *advaita* (non-duality), I believe in the essential unity of man and, for that matter, of all that lives. Therefore, I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him and, if one man falls, the whole world falls to that extent. (Naess 1974, p. 43)

In this experience, one becomes aware of the interrelated and interdependent nature of being. On an existential level, there exists a fundamental interconnection between one's self and other beings. As Buber suggests, "we live in the currents of universal reciprocity (Buber, 1970, p. 67)." From the perspective of this experience—and this is a direct experience—to harm the other is to harm one's self. From the perspective of existential interconnection, nonviolence, the essence of morality, rests upon an awareness of our fundamental interconnection.

This ontological grounding of a cosmopolitan ethic is essential. As Noam Chomsky suggests:

A vision of future social order is . . . based on a concept of human nature. If in fact man is an indefinitely malleable, completely plastic being, with no innate structures of mind and no intrinsic needs of a cultural or social character, then he is fit subject for the "shaping behavior" by the state authority, the corporate manager, the technocrat, or the central committee. (Perry, 1998, p. 57)

Erich Fromm (1947) makes the same point:

If man were infinitely malleable . . . man would be only the puppet of social arrangements and not an agent . . . no social order could be criticized or judged from the standpoint of man's welfare since there can be no concept of "man." . . . Man is not a blank sheet of paper on which culture can write its text. (p. 21-23)

What Chomsky and Fromm are asserting is that it is dangerous to assume that human nature is a complete social construction, for such a view suggests that there is ontological basis upon which justice and injustice can be determined. This lack opens the door to nihilism. The recognition of the essential unity of humanity provides, in contrast, a firm foundation for the duty of moral consideration, nonviolence, and the ethical principles of humanity.

In addition, for Gandhi, *Satya* is also pluralistic and experimental. There is one Truth; however, human beings approach, cognize, and express Truth in multiple, pluralistic, partial, and fallible ways. Gandhi writes:

... the human mind works through innumerable media and the evolution of the human mind is not the same for all, it follows that what may be truth for one maybe untruth for another ... (Naess 1974, p. 29)

Truth is both absolute and pluralistic; it requires an experimental approach. From the perspective of both the ontological and the pluralistic conception of *Satya* is derived the value of *Ahimsa*. Truth and nonviolence are interrelated. Gandhi writes:

It is only by firm adherence to Truth that one can live non-violently in a world which is full of violence. I can, therefore, derive non-violence out of truth. (Naess 1974, p. 51)

... without Ahimsa it is not possible to seek and find Truth. Ahimsa and Truth are so intertwined, that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like two sides of the same coin ... Nevertheless, Ahimsa is the means; Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our means, and so Ahimsa is our supreme duty. (Naess 1974, 52)

Nonviolence is also derived from the pluralistic nature of truth. Given that truth is also pluralistic, one is not justified in using violence. If we cannot be certain of absolute truth, then tolerance for and dialogue with the other follow. Gandhi writes:

The golden rule of conduct ... is mutual toleration, seeing that we will never all think alike and we shall see Truth in fragment and from different angles of vision. Conscience is not the same thing for all. Whilst, therefore, it is a good guide for individual conduct, imposition of the conduct upon all will be an insufferable interference with everybody's freedom of conscience. (Naess 1974, p. 28)

If everyone has a duty to follow their truth, and everyone's truth is partial and fallible, then truth dictates that we tolerate and enter into dialogue with each other, not seek to impose on, subjugate, or destroy each other.

From Gandhi's perspective, nonviolence is a universal moral obligation, and obligation is grounded in an awareness of both the essential unity of humanity and the partiality of human knowledge. Gandhi puts forth a cosmopolitan moral perspective that is ontologically grounded in a shared humanity, which requires critical self-examination and the internal transformation of consciousness. To be a cosmopolitan entails an awareness of the essential unity of humanity, and that awareness requires that we undergo an internal self-transformation that moves us from egoic centrality toward unity.

Educating for a Cosmopolitan Ethic: The Necessity of the Internal Transformation of Consciousness

The Gandhian perspective is not foreign to Western philosophy and education. It was the dominant paradigm of Ancient philosophy. For the Greeks and Romans, philosophy did not primarily concern the construction of abstract theoretical systems; philosophy was conceived as a *choice* of a way of life, a justification for that choice, and the articulation of the path or curriculum leading to the realization of the ideals of that way of life. The focus of philosophy and education

was the transformation of one's life as a mode of Being. As a path, philosophy included sets of spiritual exercises necessary for the transformation of one's being in accordance with the spiritual vision of the philosophy. Schools were formed out of the chosen way of life of the philosophy and those attracted to the philosophy. In these schools, the way of life defined by the philosophy and the understandings and exercises necessary to live that life were developed, taught, and experienced. Philosophy and inner transformation are linked in such a way that the discovery of the true and the good is contingent upon the transformation of the truth seeker's being. Education is thus devoted to the internal transformation of the consciousness of the student (Foucault, 2005; Hadot, 1993, 2002; Hadot & Davidson, 1995; Hadot & Marcus, 1998).

The necessity of internal transformation was not only pertinent to the search for truth; it had great relevance for morality as well. The moral response to others was thought to be contingent upon the quality of the moral agent's character. Character was understood as a structure of virtues or capacities that enabled one to morally respond to others. The care of the self was thus thought to be interconnected and interdependent with care for others.

However, as Michel Foucault demonstrates, at the beginning of modernity (referred to as the "Cartesian" moment), modern epistemology divorces the true and the good from the subject, resulting in the separation of knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge becomes merely the technical discovery of truth divorced from the subjectivity of the knower; education in turn becomes the transmission of technical knowledge with little or no concern for the internal subjectivity of the student. In addition, care of the self is disconnected from care of others. In this separation, modern knowledge, ethics, and education lose their transformative power (Foucault, 2005).

The cosmopolitan perspective calls for a reclamation of the ontological perspective of Gandhi and Ancient Western philosophy. If we are to be capable of responding to the inherent value and dignity of all human beings, we must undergo an internal self-transformation. The following developmental hypotheses elaborate further the interconnection between a universal duty of moral consideration and internal transformation:

1. "Self-transformation" (i.e., decreased egoic attachment, increased pre-discursive, non-positional self-awareness, and the realization of the Unity of Being) increases the capacity for empathy and, in turn, compassion. The more self-aware I am, the more I can be aware of the subjectivity of others, and thus, the more empathetic and compassionate I can be.
2. "Self-transformation" increases one's capacity for tolerance. As egoic attachment decreases, holding on to one's own truth decreases; openness to falsification and dialogue increases; hearing and understanding the other's truth increases. One becomes less rigid, decreasing the tendency to impose and thereby increasing one's capacity for tolerance.
3. "Self-transformation" increases one's capacity for restraint from doing harm. One gains a more heightened awareness of internal contradiction and disharmony. This awareness prevents one from doing harm and/or withholding charity to others.
4. "Self-transformation" decreases fear. Fear is born of duality, and it drives violence.

If valid, these hypotheses can be translated into *educational aims* focused on internal self-transformation. These aims define the core of a cosmopolitan education grounded in internal self-transformation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Realism and Cosmopolitan theory issue from fundamentally different presuppositions. Realism presupposes that communal/national identity overrides a shared humanity to the degree that moral consideration stops at the border of the society. This presupposition in turn generates a corollary assumption of the existence of a state of perpetual war.

Cosmopolitans assert the existence of a duty of moral consideration to all human beings on the basis of a presupposed shared humanity and a concomitant universal duty of moral consideration. The duty of moral consideration in turn morally requires nations and peoples to conduct their relations with each other in accordance with ethical principles that properly instantiate the intrinsic value and dignity of a shared humanity.

In turn, a cosmopolitan ethic is grounded in particular ontological presuppositions that necessitate the inner transformation of the moral agent. This understanding of what is cosmopolitan is explicated in Gandhi's nonviolent philosophy. This inner transformation, in turn, shapes the imperatives of an education consistent with a cosmopolitan ethic; an education for cosmopolitanism should reclaim the relationship between the search for true and the good and the internal self-transformation of the student.

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